The Story of Dexter D. (Denardo) Overholt

Dexter Denardo Overholt was born the eldest son of George William Overholt and Lacey (sometimes called Laney) Jane Reese on April 10, 1852. There were seven other children in the family. Originally it was thought as evidenced by the Canadian census that Dexter was born in Bavaria, a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at that time. It has recently been confirmed by birth and other records that he is the great, grandson of Abraham Overholt born in Pennsylvania. Abraham was a United Empire Loyalist and moved to Canada just after the American Revolution.

Of interest to others that may be researching this family, there were two Dexter Overholts. One was slightly older than the other and the elder one was Dexter Deverado Overholt; born to Matthew and Elizabeth Overholt. Matthew was George William Overholt's older brother. The Dexters were cousins and they lived within walking distance of each other as children. Dexter Denardo was always careful to sign documents as Dexter D. Overholt while Dexter Deverado Overholt always used his full name.

Dexter D. Overholt married Eliza Sholts (b. Dec 21, 1853), the daughter of John and Catherine Sholts in Smithville, Ontario on February 3, 1875. They took up farming on a parcel of land close to St. Catherines, Ontario. Their first two children were born in Gainsboro Township and they moved to Minnesota in the spring (April) of 1879, passing through the port of Detroit at that time. They were no doubt lured there by the offers of homestead land, as were a great many people at that time. Dexter declared his intention to become a US citizen on June the 9th,1879 and the 1880 American census finds them living in Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota.

On December 2, 1883, Dexter applied at the Crookston Land Office, for a homestead of 160 acres, in Polk County, Minnesota. It would seem that his sister Viola Overholt also filed for a homestead in the same area. It is unknown what happened to her. She may have married but we are unable to determine if she remained in the area.

Henry Lawrence Overholt was about two years old when they made the move to the USA and Clara was less than a year old. Dexter and Eliza would live in Minnesota for 10 years and while they homesteaded there, they had four more children. Lewis Therrion Overholt was born Feb 18, 1882; Minnie Edith Overholt was born next in 1887;.I have records that show Charles Arthur (also known as Harry) Overholt was also born the same year as Minnie, so it is possible that they were twins. I cannot confirm this without an accurate birth date for Minnie. Charles was born on February 4, 1887. and the fourth child born was Almeda or Alice Overholt that would put her birthdate at 1888. Alice was the last child born to Dexter and Eliza that we are currently aware of.

Dexter and Eliza moved back to Lincoln Township in Canada in 1892. George William Overholt died on August 4, 1892 and Dexter and Eliza farmed in Lincoln Township for many years. As Dexter was the first born son, the farm probably was his inheritance. His other siblings had married and all had their own families and livelihoods.

Over the next few years they would have another three children. Lowel Genis (Zenis) was born in Toronto in 1889 (perhaps on a trip to that city) and they would not have another child (Eva Beatrice) until 1898. It is possible because of the time period between these two children that there were more children that were either stillborn or miscarried but this we cannot confirm. Their last child born was Chester. Chester came along into 1902.

So now the list of their children looked like this:

Henry Lawrence Overholt (b. 04 Dec, 1878) Gainboro, Ontario
Clara Nettie Overholt (b. 1879) Gainsboro, Ontario
Lewis Therion Overholt (b. 18 Feb, 1882) Detroit Lakes, Becker, Minnesota
Charles Arthur (Harry) Overholt (b. Feb 4, 1887) Detroit Lakes,Becker, Minnesota
Minnie Edith Overholt (b. 1887) Detroit Lakes, Becker, Minnesota
Almeda (Alice) Overholt (June 10, 1891) Detroit Lakes, Becker, Minnesota
Lowel Genis (Zenis) Overholt (b. 1889) Toronto, Ontario
Eva Beatrice Overholt (b.1898) Lincoln Township, Ontario
Chester Overholt (b. 1902) Lincoln Township, Ontario

It would be some time before Dexter would feel the call to move again, but in 1913, they responded to the stories of homestead land in Alberta. They packed things up and away they went once more. This time they moved by train. The farm that Dexter had no doubt financed things for the move.

They did not however, come to Alberta with all their children. Some had married in the time they were in Lincoln County. Clara, and Minnie stayed in Ontario with their families; Alice passed away as a young lady.

Clara Nettie Overholt married John Swartz, the son of Teresa Shoaltz and Joseph Swartz. John was a farmer from Gainsborough. Her marriage license shows she was working and living in Niagara Falls at the time.

Minnie Edith Overholt married Charles Beverly Elliott, the son of Richard Elliott and Mary Lynch. Charles was a papermaker from St Catherines.

Almeda or Alice died at the age of twenty in 1908. She is buried in Fonthill Cemetery.

The group that did come to Alberta included, of course, Dexter and Eliza and 11 year old Chester. Also with the family was Lewis and Mary and their three children Beulah Clara Maude (she went by Maude), their sons Charles and Walter. As well, Zenis Overholt and his wife (also called Mary) came along. Harry and Mabel and their son Art also came with the family.

They moved all their household goods and two horses and livestock in boxcars on the train. The men rode in the boxcars to look after the livestock they brought with them.

While the women waited in Edmonton, the men went to Athabasca and then north of the river to Sawdy to locate the land they came to homestead. Eva Overholt, worked in Edmonton and came up to visit her parents for a week or two. She met and married George Rogers in February of 1914.

Dexter was sixty four years old and Eliza was fifty nine when they moved to Sawdy. Dexter was an able blacksmith and he taught his sons these skills. He cleared some land and planted a large garden. He sold vegetables to logging camps and did do some freight hauling as well. He also did some mixed farming. He used oxen for most of his heavy work.

Dexter is shown in the picture above holding the oxen by the reins. Eliza Jane is seated on the left front seat of the wagon and I believe Mabel Overholt is beside her. The young boy holding the sack is most likely Chester Overholt but it could be Art Overholt as well. I suspect that the two women sitting in the back of the wagon are Mary Overholt (Zenis' wife) and the one with the darker hair would be Mary (Parsons) Overholt.

Dexter and Eliza built a large log home with the help of their children in about 1919. During the Spanish Flu epidemic Eliza Jane passed away on March 16, 1920. Chester and Mabel also became very sick. After the death of his first wife, Dexter went back to Ontario in 1921.

There he remained for four years and finally returned to Sawdy in 1924. He met and married his second wife in Athabasca, ironically also named Eliza Jane, in 1925. Eliza Jane Brown was a widow; her maiden name was Ireland. Her parents were Isaac

Jesse Ireland and Catherine Elizabeth Ireland of Fort Perry, Ontario. Dexter and Eliza married on December 21, 1925.

They farmed for six years. Dexter had slowed down somewhat but he could still sharpen plow shares and when the old age pension came into effect they both received $10 a month. Harry Overholt took over the farm in 1930.

After almost twenty years of marriage Eliza Jane became ill and passed away at the age of 84, in November of 1944. Dexter was once again a widower. Dexter lived another five months and passed away on April 15, 1945, five days past his birthday, at the age of ninety-three.

The obituary shown to the right is incorrect. The "Mrs. Overholt" referred to here did not come with Dexter to Sawdy.

Mrs. Dexter Overholt

Funeral services were held in the Athabasca United Church, Thursday afternoon for Mrs. Dexter Overholt, of Sawdy, aged 84, who passed away at her home on Sunday.

She leaves to mourn her loss her husband, aged 91 one son several grandchidren, and a host of friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Overholt came to the district from Toronto in 1912, and have made their home here since.

Pallbearers were Harry, Walter and Chester Overholt and Mike Rogers, grandsons, and Bill and Chris Schmillzle close friends. Dolf Brown, Bowden, her son, and Mrs. Art Overholt, her granddaughter High River, attended the funeral Two nieces from Capreol, Ontario, had been paying a visit to the old couple, and had returned East a few days prior to the lady's demise.

Rev. J.H. Stark officiated.

This obituary is for Eliza Jane Brown (Ireland) who was Dexter's second wife. Dexter is buried next to both his spouses in the Athabasca Cemetery.